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SUBJECT: BRAZIL SPONSORS REFLECTIVE RACIAL CONFERENCE

¶1. Poloff participated in a June 29 meeting hosted by Itamaraty and SEPPIR (Special Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality), an advisory body to the Presidency, which aimed to explain in more detail the Regional American Conference on Advances and Challenges in the Action Plan against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances. The conference will take place in Brasilia, July 26-28, 2006. The overarching aim of the conference is to bring OAS (Organization of American States) nations together and provide an interactive forum between government and civil society to discuss the promotion and implementation of programs and policies and to increase the projection and visibility for the promotion of racial equality.

¶2. Describing the conference as an inner-reflection on the politics of race relations in the region, Minister Matilde Ribeiro of SEPPIR affirmed multiple times throughout the discourse that the conference will not be deliberative in nature, but rather is meant to be an open dialogue of experiences. When asked for the focus of the conference, the Minister replied that discussion would revolve around the Durban Plan of Action, its implementation and the associated outcomes. According to the Minister, the conference will not produce a working document. There will be two working groups (one governmental and one civil society) which will speak in plenary and a host of break-out groups (mini-plenaries) with a regional focus. Additional information is available on the conference website in English: americascontraracismo.com.br.

¶3. In total the conference hopes to attract 400 individuals, the expectation being that each country will provide four governmental representatives and four civil society representatives. SEPPIR hopes Ministers of Foreign Affairs or a delegate of their choosing will lead each delegation and has sent out invitations accordingly. The conference is only open to invitees, pre-selected by the GoB.

¶4. Comment: Throughout the meeting it appeared that the GoB was not entirely certain what the conference would accomplish. As a forum for high-level delegates to discuss racism, the conference can best be described as a grandiose thought-piece. However, with no criteria for decision making and no impetus for implementation or even a working agenda, it is unclear what they expect the outcome of the conference will be. End Comment

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